Understanding Insurgent Brand Strategy

By Scott Miller

Editorial Abstract: Mr. Miller applies his professional product marketing experience, and previous work in 'insurgent' business practices, to the task of countering suicide bombers. He presents a methodology for analyzing extremist behaviors and activities as a 'brand,' and recommends a multimedia influence campaign to help fight extremist ideologies.

Scott Miller
(Core Strategy Group)

In the "Discrediting Suicide Bombing: An Information Strategy Seminar" conducted this past August in San Antonio, all presenters were asked to challenge current thinking and business-as-usual. Asking brand marketers to participate and present was done for that reason. And I can easily imagine the combination of curiosity and cynicism that met our presentations.

Because I've worked in politics as well as business, my political clients have often warily asked me, "You're not going to sell me like a can of Coke or something, are you?"

"Oh, no!" I lie.

The truth is, if I'm going to be successful in communicating the strengths and relevant benefits of that politician, I will, indeed, be using the same strategic dynamics as I would for Coca-Cola, McDonald's, *Google* or any other product brand I've worked on. Sure, the product itself is quite different; ideally, the political candidate is going to have a more profound and better effect on voters' lives than the product brands (though, that ideal isn't always achieved). But a brand is a brand is a brand.

Any product, institution, party, group or individual leader has a brand. The brand is a sort of container for thousands of bits and bytes of information; indeed, the brand contains all of the actions, communications and interactions perceived by the consumer or voter. Remember, the brand exists in the perceptions of the consumer or voter. So the same brand may have different meaning to different individuals.

I learned in politics, with a lot of scar tissue to show for the education, that everything communicates; every detail of a campaign, planned or unplanned, is important to some important constituent. It's the same for products.

Consider the Coca-Cola brand. Estimates put its value at upwards of US $80 Billion. What is that brand? Is it the uniquely refreshing product; the pause that refreshes? Is it the distinctive contour bottle or Coca-Cola script? Is it the price, the position in the store, the ubiquitous distribution on shelves, in vending machines or at restaurants? Is it the signs and billboards? Is it the radio and TV commercials; the polar bears or Santa Claus? Is it the price or promotion or sponsorships of everything from high school scoreboards to NASCAR racing teams or NFL broadcasts? Is it the involvement in community activities? Is it the fleets of trucks we see everywhere? The answer is "yes." It's all of that.

I tell my corporate clients, "brand is everything." Just like in politics, it's every little detail. And in a successful brand campaign in politics or business, all those details are formed around on core strategy to give the brand focused meaning.

A brand is the most important and valuable asset of any company or candidate. Developing and maintaining brand value and repairing brand damage is the most important thing they can do. All this is equally true for every terror organization worldwide; their management of their brands' value is the most important thing they do. The brand's value governs their ability to recruit, attract funding and gain public support. Unfortunately, many of them do an excellent job of managing those brands.

Brand positioning is a key strategy in any consumer goods company. The same is true in the best political campaigns. And the most effective brand strategies not only position their brand, but in the process reposition the competition. That's our challenge now—to reposition the brand of the terrorist suicide bomber/martyr. It's not just a challenge; it's an imperative. We must do it, if the rest of our efforts are going to be successful. And one would have to assume we can do it; with the resources of US marketing and pop culture turned to the task.

The recent research I've seen conducted among average citizens in Arab Muslim countries indicates broad support for suicide bombing (although in the most recent research, it appears that support may be waning). I'd guess the current brand positioning of the suicide bomber/martyr is this:

- Defender of Islam
- Insurgent (vs US/Israel)
- Courageous
- Pious
- Favored by God
- Warrior/Soldier

By any objective measure this is a strong brand and its imagery is widely accepted among Middle Eastern Muslims. As we all know, this brand is carefully managed by terror organizations and even state institutions. And the

brand has a coolness factor that makes it particularly attractive to the young.

If we are going to re-position this brand, we must use the best of brand strategies and tactics, make use of the most creative talents in Western pop entertainment/marketing culture and use the most effective and credible communications channels. Of course, brand repositioning is only one element of an integrated strategy at many levels meant to confront this challenge—but it's a very important element. We've got to get it right.

We must be realistic but relentless in developing and executing those strategic and tactical brand plans.

Developing Insurgent Brand Strategy

To be successful, I'm convinced we must use an insurgent brand strategy. This information age, with greatly and constantly expanding choices and information in every marketplace (including the marketplace for radical thinking), has been very tough on incumbents… in politics and business, particularl—probably in law enforcement and the military, as well. Insurgent brands hold the cards in most markets today, as consumers demand more choice and change. The barriers to entry to new brands and new ideas have never been lower. Information flows into and out of markets at warp speed; this means more new ideas coming onto the shelves and online all the time. Incumbents in business and politics have never had it so tough.

In my corporate work, I've preached the need to understand and develop insurgent competitive strategies, particularly for traditional market incumbents like The Coca-Cola Company, Microsoft and McDonald's. The same is certainly true in this case.

Two principles guide all insurgent campaigns: do the doable and move the movable.

Do the doable … means pursuing only achievable objectives toward any goal. Never break your pick on the impossible; that only demoralizes your own supporters and energizes your enemies. It's best to establish objectives

in order of difficulty to build a sense of momentum; and celebrate every victory, no matter how small.

Move the movable… means targeting only the voters/consumers you need to win your objective. Clearly understand which individuals and what ideas or imagery can influence these constituents.

I've adapted attitudinal segmentation from politics for my business clients to understand better how to target for "do the doable" results. That segmentation looks like this:

HO SO Undecided SOS HAS

HO = Hard Opposition: These constituents oppose your brand. They hate you and the horse you rode in on. And they will actively work against you. Needless to say, you must be aware of their effect on other consumers/voters … but you just have to write off the idea of moving them in your direction.

SO = Soft Opposition: While these voters/consumers probably favor the competition's brand and may not like yours, they are not very committed. In an election, they're not likely to come out and vote in a light drizzle. So we simply try not to inflame them to action. It's the same in product marketing; they're just too expensive to move to support—at least in the short term.

Undecided: In political elections, getting that 50.1% for victory means moving every possible vote. And a campaign will do just about anything they can get away with to sway undecided voters on Election Day. They're also very expensive "votes," however. As one politician said, "The problem with these votes is you can buy them, but they don't stay bought!"

The same is certainly true in product marketing. Many mass marketers use expensive tactics like price promotion to move the mass of undecided, uncommitted consumers. And those tactics work … for a while. But then you have to win them back the next time they go shopping. You can buy their loyalty; but they don't stay bought.

SO = Soft Support: These are the voters/consumers who like your brand, but are not strongly motivated and unlikely to advocate for it. What's important is that they can be moved to harder support and even to advocating your brand much more efficiently than other groups. They're essentially in the brand franchise and most market research studies have shown that it's about six times less expensive to get a current (weak) customer to purchase more often than it is to recruit a new customer. Miller Lite doesn't really need to find new drinkers for its great tasting, less filling beer; they just need to get all of the beer drinkers who currently like the brand to buy it more often.

There's another important aspect to moving the "soft support" to "hard support." The behavior and testimonials of these consumer/voters do the best job of motivating other consumer/voters, particularly the undecided. This is the aim of viral marketing—and it's far more effective and efficient than mass marketing.

HAS = Hard Support: These are your loyalists. They can't be taken for granted, in fact, they must be activated to help pull the "soft support" toward more loyalty and activism. They usually comprise a very small group of the overall population, but they are very, very important to success.

Understanding attitudinal segmentation helps us target the truly "movable" constituents. And it will guide our strategic and tactical efforts to focus on the needs and wants of those most important consumers/voters. Incumbent mass market leaders have always considered the whole of the market in developing plans. In today's information-driven markets, however, mass marketing is simply not returning on its investment. It's important even for the biggest brands to understand how to think, plan and act like an insurgent.

Insurgents in markets and politics use change and surprise to control the competitive dialogue. They build support first among a key group of influential early adopters and try to turn those constituents into advocates—there is no more powerful advertising medium

on the planet than loyal and newly converted users.

Of course, for smaller insurgent brands today there are not the resources available to mass marketers—so they use less expensive and more innovative tactics, particularly emphasizing viral and guerilla marketing. They find a way to "go for daylight."

Consider the energy drink, Red Bull, a very typical and very successful insurgent brand. Opportunism has been the key to their marketing strategy. When they came to US markets a few years ago, they couldn't interest any of the biggest soft drink marketers in distributing their product—so they established their initial market presence through beer distributors, who had more room on their delivery trucks and more interest in new products. Instead of the super-crowded soft drink aisle, Red Bull was initially distributed in liquor stores. Carefully monitoring usage by consumers of these stores, they found that Red Bull was being used by young people as a mixer with vodka and Champagne. They followed these young people into dance clubs and helped establish the urban legend that has made Red Bull a very magnetic brand among teens and pre-teens. Of course, Red Bull couldn't afford the major sports sponsorships that Coke or Pepsi dominated—instead, they took a chance on something called the X-Games (even before ESPN got there). A series of inventive decisions made in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles have driven Red Bull's success.

Through these opportunistic means, Red Bull has become a huge force in the soft drink market; and now it has achieved ubiquitous distribution in every kind of channel and outlet, even while maintaining the rather high US $2/can price.

What can we learn from the success of insurgent brands like Red Bull, Starbucks, *Google*, Crocs, Whole Foods Markets, *YouTube* and others?

1. We must develop achievable objectives and create momentum with initial successes.

2. We can't hope to create transformation among those who are strongest in support of suicide bombing/martyrdom—rather, we should have the objective of creating a less hospitable environment for the practice and its adherents; an environment which is more likely to cooperate with more moderate forces and with law enforcement. We must "do the doable."

We must target those most likely to accept our messages, those who are likeliest to be early adopters of new information and those who will be the most active viral marketers (using word-of-mouth, the Web and other means).

I'd suggest targeting those Muslims with the most to loose if the most militant and radical Muslim ideology succeeds —and those with most in common with secular civil values, no matter their political attitudes toward the United States. These are likely to be in the arts, music, journalism, academics, science, Web technology, business (particularly marketing focused businesses), fashion, etc. That's not to say there will not be radical Muslims among them; but this is where our most attentive audience is likely to be. And they will have the greatest effect on a much wider audience of (particularly young) Muslims.

3. Of course, we will have to target those with the greatest access to communications, particularly the Web, but also satellite television and radio. We want to find the early adopters of information… who will be the best transmitters of a viral campaign, of the ideas and images we use? So we must use the most creative techniques of television, motion pictures, Web videos and advertising. This will be a very small group at first; but we must be preparing for the growing opportunity for new information sources. This brand strategy won't happen overnight. It must be sustained and adapt to change.

4. We must be very opportunistic with our brand communications; often that will mean "coat-tailing" specific news events, particularly suicide bombings. The cost in terms the deaths of innocent Muslims and other innocents must be emphasized with every bombing event. This cost must be attached to the brand of suicide bombing.

Most often we must use the news to leverage our ideas rather than expect to make the news. So it will be important to closely follow key news events.

Still, we must be willing to take risks in order to make the news; in order to change the dialogue. We must be willing to create controversy, while constantly keeping the perceptions and attitudes of our core target groups in mind.

The Basic Appeal – The "5 C's:"

As you well know, marketers and political consultants try to reach for basic human needs and emotions; I've summarized the most common of these as the "5 C's"—pardon the consultant-sounding language, but they all happen to start with the letter "c."

At the center of these five is control. It's the most basic of basic emotional needs. People seek a sense of control over their own and their families' personal security… economic security, educational/opportunity security, health security. Of course, they also want control over the forces of powerful institutions. They seek out products and ideas that convey the perception of giving them more control, whether that's a credit card, a candidate or a Kalashnikov.

Next is choice. Choice provides a means of gaining a sense of control. Obviously, this is fundamental to democracy. In markets, people see expanding choice as expanding control. As I've said, there are more choices than ever on today's markets' shelves – with the selection expanding every day. You can choose your favorite flavor of ideology, too.

Customization is a fairly recent phenomenon. Mass marketing was based on the philosophy of optimization; using the least technology and manufacturing costs to appeal to the greatest number of people. Remember the tube socks of the 1980's? That was really the poster child of optimization: "One size fits all!" But the information age has changed the power of mass marketing fundamentally. With more choice

and infinite information, consumers feel they can search for "that one that fits just me." They desire or demand customization to their needs. This effect is most developed in the most developed information markets; so, of course, in the controlled information environments of the Middle East, it will be slower to develop… but it will develop. And encouraging the "find your own personal answer" nature of customization will be very important to eroding the power of group-think.

Change is next: it promises new choices and greater customization. Less than a decade ago, change was seen as a negative. Increasingly, though, consumers and constituents see change, even radical change, as a positive. Again, this is most true in developed information environments and less so in controlled or limited environments. Consumerist societies have come to expect better and better solutions; controlled societies expect more of the same. Still, though, we can expect this dynamic to become more and more important over the long run.

Connection is also very important. Though the day of "badge brands" and following the pack have faded and consumers in Western society are less likely to wear clothes emblazoned with the hippest logos, people want to connect with that small group that shares their affinity for a customized brand or idea. And, of course, the Web has been a great tool for this kind of informal social organization through its many social networks like MySpace and FaceBook. The success of even very small blogs is infectious. It's a natural human response to seek connection to a group of like minded individuals. Through the Web, people can find a group that fits their own style much more personally than through mass communications media.

Convenience is basic, but necessary. It's about the accessibility of your concept and its usefulness. The other night I heard comedian Ellen Degeneres making a great observation; in traffic you no longer see people singing along to the radio in their cars. Now they're multi-tasking; talking on the cell phone, using GPS systems, putting on make-up or shaving… even texting or reading. We are packing more into our crowded lives – so we need more conveniences to make it all work. As a marketer, I always want to make choices easy for consumer to make; convenient to their lifestyles and attitudes.

We've got to keep these "5 C's" in mind in developing brand plans, no matter the target audience. We must use them to understand the magnetism of the suicide bomber/martyr brand; and we must use them to deflect that magnetism as well.

Application of Basic Appeal: TV Celebrity Vanna White promotes both fleet force projection and sports cars. (US Navy)

Developing Brand Strategy:

Successful brand strategies have many common components. This is true for any brand—company, institution, product, political candidate, terrorist group. As I've said, a successful insurgent brand campaign will set achievable objectives, even on the way to a very challenging overall goal (that's what "do the doable" is all about). The successful campaign will be targeted narrowly against the group with which it can have the greatest likely effect; the group that will have the greatest influence on other groups (following the principle of "move the movable").

Every brand, no matter how large or small, must develop five key components: presence, relevance, differentiation, credibility and imagery. I'm sure every brand guru has their own set of terms and rules, but the basics remain the same.

Presence: Awareness is key to acceptability of a brand. The brand has to be "out there" and seen to be used by others, before the masses will adopt it. Most product brands achieve awareness through distribution—but also through packaging, point-of-sale materials, advertising, PR, promotions, events and sponsorships. Think of the incidence of the Coca-Cola brand in your own neighborhood—seeing the bottles and cans in use and in convenience stores or super markets, noticing the special displays there, the delivery trucks, the promotion at fast-food restaurants, the stadium scoreboard ads and on and on.

Brands carefully manage their market presence and brand associations. Some create scarcity of their brand (say, for instance, an upscale brand like BMW) to create more value. Most new brands today recognize the importance of brand associations—which brands they will rub elbows with on the shelf or on the street. Distribution at Whole Foods Markets guarantees an image of natural goodness. Being in Urban Outfitters guarantees youthful hipness. We must consider the brand associations of any communications meant to reposition the suicide bomber/martyr brand. What local information environment will give us the greatest credibility and effect? What images do we want to surround ours?

Relevance: Any brand must communicate how it fits into the potential user's life—it must demonstrate benefits that are as personal as possible to the user. That's why brand marketers and political consultants use those "5 C's" in developing relevant appeal. Too many brand marketers forget how important the product experience is in developing relevance—it's the strongest communicator of brand; and all the imagery in the world won't overcome a bad experience.

The positioning of the suicide bomber/martyr brand is dripping with relevance for "the Arab Street:" fighting perceived oppression, using underdog

imagery, giving more control, allowing personalized affiliation, promising choice and change, connection and even convenience (ubiquitous presence). It provides relevance by appealing to a sense of humiliation and powerlessness. But it also challenges basic human values and Muslim beliefs. It results in suicide and death; in the maiming and killing of innocent Muslims and others. It preys on the minds of innocent youth —manipulated by cynical and self-serving political rather than religious masterminds.

Differentiation: The most valuable brands carefully develop relevant differentiation. Differentiation is about uniqueness in the marketplace. So even small terrorist brands probably compete for unique brand appeal. It's scarcity that creates value and differentiation creates scarcity (if you ask me, the number one product brand positioning in the world is "Me, Too!"… most product categories provide a sea of sameness; that makes differentiation even more valuable). In developing brand strategy to reposition the suicide bomber/martyr brand, we must develop value for another position —positioning it as a crime rather than a political or military act and making heroes of those in the community who fight or deter this crime.

Credibility: Every brand provides an implicit promise, whether it's whiter whites and brighter brights or defeating the infidels. In markets full of choices, successful brands develop credibility through the way in which the brand experience fulfills the brand promise.

To deliver on the brand promise, you must define expectations in advance. Ideally, you'll over-deliver on those expectations (and not over-promise and under-deliver). It strikes me that this is a weakness of the terrorist brands—they are inclined toward very grandiose claims, toward over-promise. If the brand experience is positioned (in fact, re-positioned) successfully, that weakness can be exploited. A great deal of exploration of the ultimate promise of the terrorist ideology has been done —it's one thing to support an event or even series of events, but to play out

that brand promise and ideology into a true fundamentalist Caliphate would indeed terrify most Muslims. It's easy to support the abstract notion of suicide bombing; but harder to support the pain, anguish and death in up-close and personal terms.

Imagery: As I've indicated, the most important definer of brand imagery is the product experience. Coca-Cola provides a very refreshing product experience; thirst-quenching, lift, bubbles … refreshment, without a cloying aftertaste. And, wisely, Coca-Cola has created its brand imagery for over a century around

Whose brand is he selling?
(Defense Link)

refreshment of body, mind and spirit (Mean Joe Greene, the polar bears and Santa Claus have all been images of refreshment).

Fighting powerful oppressive forces is the image of the insurgent or revolutionary. It's the powerful imagery of the underdog. Just think of what the 1960's Paul Davis romantic poster portrait of Che Gueverra did for his image. The ski mask and black uniforms characterize radical Muslim terrorists. The suicide bomber/martyr is seen in the light of this image. But maimed and murdered Muslim women and children provide the underside of that image. Frightened, fidgety, sometimes drugged

and almost always carefully manipulated and intimidated young suicide bombers are also out of kilter with the idealized insurgent image. And so are those who manipulate them; those who preach but wouldn't possibly practice martyrdom.

My argument is simple, if a little crass: to reposition the brand of the suicide bomber/martyr, we must use these same components that are used to sell toothpaste and basketball shoes. Our challenge is that we must do this better than the terrorists are doing it – and they are doing it very well.

Repositioning The Suicide Bomber/Martyr Brand:

Earlier in this memo I made a guess at the elements of the suicide bomber/martyr brand:

- Defender of Islam

- Insurgent (vs. US/Israel)

- Courageous

- Pious

- Warrior/Soldier

- Favored by God

I've also guessed that our key target will be young secular influentials—early adopters of information. These are likely to be consumers of news, music, TV drama, Web information and videos, theater, literature and art.

I think it's simply unrealistic to assume one can target radicals with communications. Rather, I'd try to isolate them more within the total Muslim community; and try to create more "coolness" for thought, speaking/writing and acting against these radicals.

And in the spirit of "do the doable," I don't believe we can over-reach in trying to reposition this brand. We must drive the point of the wedge between these radicals and majority Muslims and drive that wedge over time. We've got to have realistic objectives along the way to the goal of creating a rift in attitudes. So, as in all successful brand campaigns, we must sustain our effort.

Here's how I'd hope we could reposition the suicide bomber/martyr brand by moving the current brand imagery only a few notches:

- Defender of radical Islam intended to create a fundamentalist society

- Insurgent tool (a weapon used by insurgents)

- Imbalanced/confused/manipulated/intimidated (manipulated into a seemingly courageous act)

- Robot/human bomb (not a soldier, not even trained or armed and often not in control of the detonator)

- Condemned by God (killer of Muslim innocents; murderer; suicide)

For young people, we want them to see the brand as uncool, very un-hip. And we can only do that by developing imagery that is vivid and engaging; that cannot be ignored.

Let's think about the key components of that repositioning. I believe it will take a number of different tactics in different channels. We must make the most of Western pop culture, but also make the most of radical Web culture. We must recognize the power of Web posting —if the video is interesting enough and compelling enough, it will be seen and circulated widely. It will be talked about in the news and on the street.

Again I'll emphasize; this won't be easy. In the beginning it will depend on efforts almost totally developed internally. But with time and momentum, the point of the brand campaign should be to support those who develop their own versions of these same ideas.

I'd recommend a strategy that has five basic and integrated elements:

1. Coat-tail the news. Do not allow the victims of suicide bombings to be debased into numbers. Using the Web, television where possible, radio and street posters, communicate the humanity of every victim. Emphasize their hopes and aspirations, their connections to family, friends and community (the Mothers Against Drunk Driving have done an excellent job of this in television campaigns in the US that use home video and testimonials of family members to "bring to life" the victims of accidents caused by drunks).

Develop Web video clips that recreate dramatically the events of a real bombing. As you'll see, I believe we must use the best available talent from motion pictures and television to create the most engaging and evocative images. And I know these talents are quite willing to enlist (as they were in WWII) to help in this effort.

For instance, imagine portraying a young Muslim girl leaving for school in the morning, interacting lovingly with her family and walking to the bus stop where a young, nervous, sweaty and chain-smoking suicide bomber awaits. In these video recreations, always use real events and real victims. If these clips are engaging and emotional, they will not only attract more viewers but increase the likelihood of being picked up on the news channels.

Few people have seen a suicide bomber, but they must consider his death instant and virtually painless. Still, the Koran promises that those who commit suicide are condemned to an eternity of the pain of the moment of their death. I believe we could use computer-generated graphics in a Web video posting to recreate the act of a real suicide bomber exploding himself and blowing apart seemingly several different times— followed by text showing the Koranic edict. There would be a voice-over at the end: "The people who used this boy as a human bomb told him he would be favored by God… but they were wrong. God condemns suicide. God condemns the killing of innocents. So he is burning and burning and burning in hell… forever. Raise your voice before the next suicide bombing."

The Web is an ideal base even in the Middle East for wider distribution of the brand positioning. It will have relevant appeal to true Muslim values against suicide and murder of innocents; reservations that we know already exist and are mounting.

We must portray the suicide bombers as victims, not criminals (and certainly not as military personnel). They have been manipulated into un-Muslim and horrendous acts. The "bad guys" always must be the manipulators—the masterminds of suicide bombing and their callous tendency to use younger and younger suicide bombers, because it is more cost efficient to do so. These are not religious people, but political activists who use religion as a cover. When we portray them, we must see them in imagery of cynicism and comfort, even as the acts are being carried out. They are far from the danger and destruction.

2. Develop a movement to report suicide bombing activity. Although law enforcement authorities often lack the trust of the people in the Middle East, we must try to create a "people-to-people" system of reporting suspicious activity in a neighborhood. Ideally, this would appeal to mothers and appeal emotionally to their own instincts – ideally, it would also be managed by volunteer mothers; to ensure the anonymity of the callers. We would want to create a simple cell-phone number to call to report activities and individuals who arouse suspicions in a local community. And we'd want to make heroes of those who make the commitment to call. This is currently being done in the United Kingdom—I'm sure the approach and its effect are being carefully monitored here. Once again, this is a tactic that will not get traction immediately—the effort must be sustained. With all of our communications, we must emphasize the opportunity for an individual to make a difference, to save innocent Muslim lives and prevent harm and anguish for others.

It should be in the interest of every government to help develop this kind of system and in the best interests of the cellular telephone companies to help market it and manage it.

3. Create a radical website "parallel Universe." I believe we must turn this effective communications tool against the terrorists. One way is to create a flood of ersatz radical websites with surprise postings; some using all of the radical imagery, in fact, trying to copy them in every way, but with a moderating, anti-suicide bombing set of messages or with spoof humor (who hasn't seen the *YouTube* clip from the Fox television series *Family Guy* of Osama bin Laden laughing his way through a video taping?).

The point is to replicate the radical sites in as many ways as possible, but use the kind of broad humor of a movie like *Hot Shots, Part Deux* to ridicule or humiliate them. We must corrupt their tools of communications. We must try to destroy their dignity. The goal would be to create doubt any time anyone goes to one of the websites. Like *The Daily Onion*, we would create a "parallel universe" of radical websites. Is it true or a spoof? We'd want to create that doubt—and a little anticipation of the latter. Even for supporters of the radicals, it would be impossible not to watch.

4. Develop and post a television drama (in video clip, webisode or program-length versions) to reinforce our repositioning themes: Perhaps the greatest power of US communications is in television and film drama/comedy. Drama on US television is dominated by crime series, for instance, *Law & Order*, *CSI* and *24*. I believe we should use these very same talents and formulas to create a "crime drama" series for Web posting (perhaps to be picked up at a later date by satellite TV). The point would be to create engaging and compelling dramatic situations that would carry our messages.

My assumption is that we could create a drama of a special law enforcement unit specifically designed to combat suicide bombing (like one of the many specialist groups depicted in off-shoots of "Law & Order"). This drama would create an interesting group of young characters as a part of this special unit; representing differing personalities, political beliefs and even religious convictions – but all dedicated against this heinous crime and, particularly, the callous thugs who manipulate the bombers (who would be depicted as young, confused, frightened and totally controlled and intimidated by these manipulators). This would not just be "White Hats vs. Black Hats," but a more nuanced drama that illuminates the complicated feelings surrounding this issue; at the bottom line though, is this unit's dedication to save innocent lives. These would also make heroes of moms, kids and other in the community who

raise their voices to deter this crime – and elevate the imagery of the experts who fight it, the clerics who speak against it.

These dramas could be of any length, though it would be ideal if they can be edited easily into satellite TV format (hour-length programming) and also provide interesting shorter moments to post as video clips. Of course, these would have to have the authentic look and feel of the Arab street, produced in Arabic and set in an unspecified, but believable environment.

The point, of course, would be to create a magnetic drama that can carry the core themes and messages of the brand strategy. A goal would be to gain placement on satellite TV, but it may have to be Web posted in the beginning to build buzz and build an initial early adopter audience. Another goal would be to make the show commercially viable for those satellite TV distributors. And, of course, the over-arching goal is to create riveting imagery and dramatic action that is simply impossible to ignore, no matter your beliefs.

5. Raise voices against suicide bombing: faces and voices of famous pop culture and sports icons are being used in a "voices against violence" campaign in the US and have been used many times in global relief or awareness raising efforts. It seems to me that we could develop the same thing among Muslim youth influencers (mostly pop music, TV/Movie, sports) simply raising a voice against the killing of innocent Muslim civilians. These could take the form of typical US pro bono advertising, but would likely have to be placed on the Web; even *YouTube*. This is not to promote a political view, but rather a moral one: no matter your politics, you cannot support the idea of suicide bombing; the manipulation of children, the killing of innocent Muslims.

Among these voices and faces could be respected clerics and academics and popular political leaders.

The point would be (in their own words): "What a waste/what a sin/how uncool."

Also, as if addressing the suicide bombers themselves: "When they ask

you to live a pious life, tell them you will follow them. When they ask you to martyr yourself as a suicide bomber … tell them you will follow them."

These commercials might be carried by satellite or state TV (who could say they're against it?)—but it should be backed up with frequent Web postings. The same technique can be used on radio and in print advertising for newspapers.

Closing Thoughts

It's very clear that we all face a tough challenge and an audience that will be difficult to penetrate, let alone motivate. Still, we must try. And we must use the best strategies, tactics and resources available for the effort. This is how one brand marketer would attack the problem. At the very least, I hope it will inspire some new thinking and creative action.

Q&A With Scott Miller

IO Sphere: The Defense Department can be pretty dogmatic. Why wouldn't we use some of your marketing principles & techniques? Are we just slow to adopt?

SM: Even in most businesses business, marketing is seen as a tangential part of the process: oh, those are just the guys who do the Superbowl commercials! What I say to CEOs or anyone who communicates is that the dictionary calls marketing 'something that adds value to the transaction.' So I tell them, if you're doing anything in your company - on the loading dock or executive meeting rooms - that doesn't add value, stop immediately! You can add a marketing construct to anything you're doing, any time you're trying to persuade somebody. Certainly we've seen marketing principle applied to politics and governance. Now we see radical change in the Information Revolution where incumbent brands, candidates and institutions have it tougher than they ever had. Because all information consumers have access to almost limitless choices and endless amounts of information, all the time, it has made it the toughest time ever to be an incumbent and a great time

for insurgent forces. In the commercial world the barriers to entry for new ideas have never been lower. There are so many little brands now. For someone like Coke, Pepsi's not the worry: it's the 'thousands of little ducks pecking at them.' Little brands made by young entrepreneurs make it to the shelf now, which was always the toughest part before. Retailers know customers want new things, and they put them out there. And the same applies to government.

IO Sphere: DOD recently commissioned a study enlisting Madison Avenue's help, because the US 'brand' is a bit tarnished. Are we just not delivering what we advertised?

SM: I think we've over-promised in a way we can't deliver. We're trying to be 'Home Depot,' you know: "You can do it; we can help!" And in military competence, we're the worlds best, even when bad things happen. Of the research I've seen, there's high credibility for the military: they have to face the truth all the time; it's seen in daily action. I think the worst part is the political 'shine,' where politicians are trying to make it all things to all people: kind, friendly, nice, democratic values—which is just like airlines over-promise today! I'm a four million-miler with Delta Airlines, and I've never once had the luxurious experience promised in their ads. Again, it's over-promise and under-deliver.

But yes, if we could set our expectations more reasonably, we'd have a better military image. It's true that every brand is going to be most formidably communicated by the product experience, say with politician once you get to know him. But that 'bubble' he's on can leak away slowly or burst quickly. What you want to do is set expectations realistically, and then beat them.

IO Sphere: DOD customers seemed to like your 'business insurgent' essays and the special operations mentality, where you're not thinking as much like a heavy, conventional force.

SM: I don't know anything about military strategy and tactics, but what I

do see as far this 'insurgent brand' goes is their desperation marketing. They're trying to elbow their way into the world, and they have no mass marketing. Mass tends to work against big companies: you end up with big inventories, and those 15 year old marketing techniques just don't work anymore. To put an ad on *YouTube* and get the 40 million hits only has the production cost and the rest is free. Viral or word-of-mouth marketing today is so much stronger than mass marketing, something like 80 percent versus 6 percent. You have tough, cynical customers out there in every marketplace to include political. You sure can't use incumbent tactics anymore. In the 1996 and 2004 campaigns [US General Elections], the incumbent had to run as an insurgent against somebody. Similarly, the 2008 elections are going to be determined by the most insurgent voice. Big organizations can learn: Coca-Cola learned, and McDonalds learned to fight against themselves, against their own images—and did that successfully.

IO Sphere: You use very strong terms about branding: 'it is everything a company does and says.' How do you do that with something as big and complex as the US Government?

SM: Consumers and voters believe if something is complex, it's on purpose. Technology has taught them that complex things, like the iPod, are going to be made simple: machines are going to work for man. That's was the original concept with Apple. People's anticipation is that complexity will become simpler to serve mankind. But government just keeps getting more complex, you know, "don't bother getting involved because you couldn't possibly understand." In that case, people are very suspect. In a successful campaign, every little detail is wrapped around one core strategy—and the candidate is disciplined to stay with a simple message.

In Gulf War I, the strategy went from the President to the infantryman: a madman with the world's fifth largest army has invaded a sovereign nation; committed terrible crimes; threatens to

invade others; and threatens a world market we care about… he must be stopped! We have got to destroy that army, send the invader back, and make reparation. Everybody got it: conviction, mandate, focus, action. That seemed to me like a very clear, disciplined message strategy.

But discipline wins in every single kind of campaign… take something as complex as *Google*—which works on algorithms I'll never understand—but what I do understand is that I'm in consideration mode the moment I hit that site. I'm looking to buy. They're going to surround me with relevant information, and the more I click in, the more they're going to surround me with more relevant information… they have seven or eight hundred thousand advertisers! And those companies swear by *Google*, because they've probably created the most relevant marketing vehicle that has yet existed. They've made complexity simple. If the government can't do that inside & out, getting our message out will be impossible.

IO Sphere: Some say people are OK talking to an individual, even while cursing that person's culture. Or, "I hate America, but still drink Coca-Cola." Can a love of pop culture and products help mend international relationships?

SM: Sure. Common ground always helps. Enjoyable common ground always helps. I just met the woman sitting next to me, yet we found common ground. I ride horses, and am into show jumping, and meet people from all kinds of countries. We may not agree on governments, but we have no disagreements about the beauty of horses, the joys of winning, and the owner's responsibilities in taking care of their horses. No real disagreements. It's often true of artists and musicians, and even journalists.

We've always positioned Coca-Cola as one of those simple little things people can share… about which they can have a common experience. This is nice, this is refreshing! You can see someone is enjoying this just like you are. Seeing a family at McDonald's is no different in Cairo or Chicago: you

see the same familiar dynamic. You can kind of know if that family is having fun, or just talking, or arguing. As crass as our world of marketing is, we can help create those little bridges. We can agree on things like *Google*—80 percent of people on line use that. I just watched three little videos on *You Tube*, and I didn't understand a word… but they were just fun! They were making fun of songs I've never heard. But kids were having fun spoofing something serious, and you'd have no idea where these lids were from. They have the same ironic sense of humor and 'spoofery' as my kids do… those sorts of things travel. Working with the Walt Disney Company I sure saw how Mickey Mouse, or Caribbean Pirates, or a bunch of penguins travel. A friend of mine, Michael Harbert, did an eight minute webisode of the popular show *24*, just stuck it there on the website, and quickly got 41 million hits. That means it is instantly global, and everybody watching, while they may have differing political interpretations, is caught up in the excitement, and adrenalin, and fun. They're all together. So I do think the product world, even with our oversimplification of messaging and relevant benefits—even if it is just toothpaste or sneakers or soda pop. But those are common ground features, and that can bring us closer. When I go to McDonalds conventions, I meet people from across the world, and we have enormous common ground. So yes, I think these sorts of commercial things provide some compensation to what's common.

Recognize there is an art of persuasion in everything we do, and if you use strategy, it tends to go better, whether it's interpersonal relationships, convincing large groups of people who to vote for, or to buy the right products. Recognizing that strategy and discipline win, you want to do a lot of listening and observing. Corporate people ask the difference between political leadership and corporate leadership, and I say "the level of mediocrity and genius are both the same." <laughs> What's different is that about the time they reach the executive vice president level in a company—you probably have this in

government too—it's not in anyone's best interest to tell them no, or tell them they're wrong, or say their idea is stupid. But smart political people, and young people looking to be successful, soon become very interested in what's going on and why, how does this work; and, what is the ground truth?

IO Sphere: You point out the need for observing and listening, yet the time for reflection seems hard to come by in government service. Folks want to see action.

SM: Very true. There are lots more stresses, more consequences. I get paid to think and tell the truth, or say "I don't know, or let me think about that." But the biggest thing is I get paid to tell people is "that's a stupid idea… don't do it!" They need that. I make room for my many notebooks, for recording what I see, what I hear, what's going on, and what makes sense.

Anyone wanting to influence people need to spend the time understanding what to make of things. Stanford University released a study recently saying anything with the McDonalds

logo on it tastes better to kids! Imagine how powerful that is. They can influence what kids eat just because of the volume business they do. When they looked at their own research over the past five years, McDonalds realized it wasn't the book *Supersize Me* or other critical accounts, their own research showed they are food for a lot of people. McDonalds felt the responsibility to step up to that challenge, and be honest with themselves about it.

Now for one client I can't name, we had to force them to do employee research about their products—because employees will always be tougher than the public as a whole. They were very cynical and negative: that's a very unhealthy cultural situation. You can't do that. People want to do what's right, and believe in what they're doing. I've been fortunate to work with these top companies like Apple, Microsoft, *Google* when they're on the rise—and those people are on a crusade! You have to feel that… if you're half-hearted and cynical, you'll do it badly. You can't just fool someone into doing something, because people are more sophisticated and savvy, and they'll see the falsehood coming.